

TAGORE'S GENDER-CONSCIOUSNESS IN HIS PERCEPTION OF THE DIVINE IN HIS “POOJA”: DEEPER FOLDS OF ANXIETY

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ABSTRACT

Tagore's devotional song offerings to the omnipotent, omniscient divine in the “Pooja Porjay” of *Gitanitan*, reveal an intriguing perceptual contingency, especially regarding the gender of the divine. What is interesting is the conscious use of language that problematizes gender-consciousness. Tagore's divine is often essentially masculine – the friend, master, husband, father or beloved while the poet concomitantly assumes the role of the submissive spouse, lady-love or friend in strikingly intimate humane anger, affection, allegations or unconditional self-surrender. Much has been said about the Vaishnava influences on Tagore and the affiliation to the concept of “Hladini-shakti”, but the striking similarity to the Judaeo-Christian and Greco-Hellenic concept and subsequently the Christian figural elasticity of the Son of God, that perceives “logos” as the confluence of the human self and the divine calling, brings forth intriguing queries regarding the true nature of the devotional songs as well as the overlapping gender-positions in Tagore's conscious use of language. What remains a perplexity is the linguistic fluidity in the continual shifting of paradigms, arching over multifarious cultural portfolios; the devotional songs remaining anxious quest for the true essence of the divine, attempted through continual wrestling with the words and playing with gender-positions.

KEYWORDS: Divine, Masculine, Logos, Devotion, Words, Ambiguity

INTRODUCTION

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results.

Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time...it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure.

Judith Butler

The yearning for certitude as a quest stretches through the sensuous, emotional and intuitive modes of cognition, for a conceptual fixity that the intellect attempts to register in some sort of hypothetical totality and contingent closure of linguistic constructs. The exactitude of a conceptual absolute, however, remains elusive and the frustrated verbal modules evolve continually in an attempt to grasp a perceptual clarity deferred perpetually. What appears to be ‘absolute’ and definite gradually emerges as a point of profound perplexity. Umberto Eco, in *Inventing the Enemy* asserts that an idea of a perceptual ‘absolute’ is in itself quintessentially undefinable. He says –“An expression like absolute...does not suggest descriptions, definitions and classifications; we cannot think of any instructions for producing anything corresponding to it...” (p.26). This human tendency to codify the essentially undefinable and volatile into a certitude of definitiveness,

usually granted by the sense of an absolute, Eco believes, might perhaps emanate from an intrinsic fear: “As we are contingent beings... we desperately need to think there is something to fasten onto that will not perish” (p.26). Hence the continual attempt at compartmentalization and stereotypes.

Against this backdrop the apparently absolutist distinctions between gender emerges as an essentially discursive formation – an essentially social and positional construct, conditioned by cultural bearings and often subjugated to the repressive reign of the prevailing. Judith Butler argues in the chapter ‘Subject of Sex/Gender/Desire’, the traditional or conventional societal imposition of differences between genders is but an effect of a given version of a ‘representational politics’ (p.3). Gender, argues Butler in a reference to Wittig, is created through powerful semantic representations as “Language gains power to create the socially real through the locutionary acts of speaking subjects”(p.156).

Interestingly enough, a reading of Rabindranath Tagore’s song offerings in the ‘Pooja’ phase of *Gitabitan* suggests an intriguing problematic of deliberate gender subversion, attempted through the conscious linguistic mode of addressing the Transcendental Absolute. The divine is frequently addressed as the beloved /‘bandhu’, husband/‘swami’, ‘param pati’, the friend and lover, while the poetic self concomitantly assumes a female voice, articulating a kaleidoscopic variety of love, anxiety, unconditional surrender, intense longing and sentimental complaints. The diction is overtly transgressive operating through an intriguing free play of attributes commonly presumed to characterize the feminine as a definite substantive substrate.

Human thoughts are largely shaped by cultural influences and the cultural heritage embedded in the language of a race coordinate with the multiple strata of the human consciousness. An act of gender subversion is invariably operative inside a social discourse and as Judith Butler asserts, “within an established set of literary conventions – within certain concrete narrative structures ...and cultural conventions that produce and regulate the attributes” (p.133). The fact that language, thought and socio-cultural dimensions are inextricably intertwined, in a way, suggests a problematic of a profound cultural significance. Schulz cites Benjamin Lee Whorf who observes in ‘A Linguistic Consideration of Thinking in Primitive Communities’ –“The problem of thought and thinking in the native community is not purely and simply a psychological problem. It is quite largely cultural. It is moreover largely a matter of one especially cohesive aggregate of cultural phenomena that we call language.” (p.15).

Roland Barthes voices an almost similar notion in his ‘From Work to Text’ where he describes a text as “culturally woven of quotations, echoes: cultural languages (what language is not cultural?), antecedent...which traverse it through and through in a vast stereophony”(pp.59-60). Tagore’s consciousness is profoundly imbibed with resonances of the deeper folds of emotional response rooted in a rich and multifaceted cultural past. The Creator, the Omniscient One or the Absolute Consciousness in such a cultural polyphony, has time and again been conceived as an androgenic totality, and yet a concomitant recognition of the female sensibility- the devotion and yearning of a female psyche as a powerful agency, has enjoyed central significance. The feminine becomes a part of the divine in a glorious union and it is in this very union in which the creator-created, God-human relation assumes the sexed gender dimension of the male-female union, that the realms of the highest spiritual experience becomes tangible. It is through such a union that the Transcendental can be touched. Gender-specific identities are thus problematized and an intriguing fluidity is suggested in the Indic cultural “stereophony”.

Tagore’s Brahmo affiliations refused to ascribe a physical form to the transcendental divine, and yet Tagore’s poetic self apparently revolts against any such stricture. His songs repeatedly personify the divine in the form of a male

beloved, king or ruler of the heart. He asserts in letter no. 15 dated 4th July 1910 included in *Chithipatra* (vol.7): "Due to a plenitude of poetic consciousness from an early stage my mind never got restricted to any particular mode of worship, despite my birth in a Brahmo family". Myriad influences of the vast and bewildering variety of a multifaceted culture and ancient literature weave a rich tapestry of consciousness that repeatedly drives the poetic self into an irreducible plurality of perceptions.

From the Samkhya philosophy, *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, the Sufi songs, Baul and Vaishnavism, Shaiva cults and the Christian resonances to Kalidasa's rich poetic output, Tagore's assimilative consciousness is infused with unfathomable depths and multiple folds of perceptions that inevitably find overt expressions in his conscious gender position in the devotional songs. Tagore's subversion of the binary gender position in the songs of 'Pooja' is rooted in a rich cultural lineage that defies the straitjacket of gender division in the essence and a complete realization of the transcendental divine; the male often assumes the female prerogative for the ultimate communion.

Tagore's *Prachin Sahitya* reveals his profound appreciation of ancient Indian literature, especially that of Kalidasa's *Meghdutam*, *Kumarsamvabam* and *Shakuntalam*. His consciousness is perpetrated with the beauty and grandeur of the Sanskrit verses but what appears to engross his critical faculty is the rejection of physical attraction in preference of a purified devotion that attains completeness in a perfect spiritual union. What enjoys a central importance in his response to the narrative in *Kumarsamvabam* is the rejection of Parvati's physical beauty enhanced by Madana, the god of desire, in favour of a deep devotion attained through an all-relinquishing, transformational process of 'sadhana'. This redefines and repositions the conventional gender attributes, transporting them beyond the confines of the body politic. The voice of the female devotee becomes an agency, a linguistic literary construct laden with deeper folds of significance, embodying the intense longing essential for the ultimate communion. The female form is equated with an intrinsic stability, and depth of sensibility comparable to the life-force of the universe. The male form, in contrast, is incomplete. In *Paschim Jatrir Diary* [28th September, 1924], he writes – "Purusher prakriti-te shristikorta-r tuli apon sesh rekha-ta tane ni. Purush-ke asompurno-i thakte hobe...Nari prokriti aponar sthiti-te protisthito." [The Creator's brush has not drawn the final line in the male who thus would remain perpetually incomplete while the female is established in its innate stability].

Gender division as a formative principle of sexed identities, merges in a strikingly harmonious whole in the literary discourse of ancient Indian literature. The division is arbitrary and for the sole purpose of procreation. In the second canto of *Kumarsamvabam* the gods address Brahma the Creator, as the original source that had willfully divided itself into male and female forms – the source in which the arbitrary gender forms merge in a perfect harmony:

Stree-pungsha batmo vagou te vinno murteh shishukkhaya

Prasutivajoh swargosya tobebo pitorou smitrou.

[you have divided yourself into the male and the female who are the parents of this creation] Again in the same canto

Twamanasti prakriting purushartho-prabartinim

Taddorshi namudasinong twamebo purushong biduh.

[the enlightened ones say that you are the prakriti- the source of creation and the all passive witness –the purusha]

The first canto of *Raghuvangsham* too refers to the union- the blending of the male and female forces that must emerge in a totality – even as the word and meaning in a poetic module merge to form a coherent whole:

Bagartha bibo sampriktau bagartha protipatyaye

Jagatoḥ pitorou bonde Parvoti parameshwarou

[for the right comprehension of words and their senses, I salute Parvati – the mountain's daughter and parameswara – the supreme lord, the parents of the universe, who are perpetually united even as words and their meanings are].

This invocation of the image of the Ardhanarishwara, the cultural icon of the androgenic identity, interestingly, defies the conventional bipolarity of the genders. That the gender fluidity and androgenic totality is an integral part of the Indic cultural and literary mosaic is revealed in the variety of ancient motifs from different parts of the country. Ardha-yuvatiswara of Assam, the motif of 'dehardo-ghatana' of *Mahimanastava* composed in the Gupta period, the Gourishwara of the *Vishnu dharmottara*, the Vedic composite figure of Yama-Yami, the androgynous cosmic 'Purusha' of the *Brihadakaranya Upanishad* who divides his own self into male and female forms for generating life, the *Shwetashwata Upanishad* defining Rudra or the antecedent of the Puranic Shiva as the creator of life and the original source of all male and female principles, the iconographic 16th century work *Shilparatna*, the *Matsya Purana* and South Indian Agamic texts like *Amshumadbhedagama*, *Kamikagama*, *Supredagama* and *Karanagama* describing the iconography of androgenic Ardhanarishwara, Kashmiri Shaivism as well as the *Mahabharata* [Book XIII] with Upamanyu praising Shiva's androgenic form as the source of all creation in tandem with the *Linga Purana*, *Vayu Purana*, *Vishnu Purana*, *Skanda Purana*, *Kurma Purana*, and *Markandeya Purana* projecting the Ardhanarishwara form of Rudra (identified with Shiva) among many more, are reflections of the heritage of an androgenic totality.

Essays like 'Naronari', 'Mon' and 'Akhondota' published initially as *Diary* in the magazine titled *Sadhona* and later as an anthology titled *Panchobhoot* reveal that Tagore is deeply committed to the basic oneness of 'purusha' and 'prakriti' in the androgenic icon of the ancient Indian tradition. In 'Nawronari', he identifies 'purusha' or the male as essentially a hermit – an all-relinquishing passive consciousness, while 'prakriti' or the female is identified as the relentless flow of activity manifested in the kaleidoscopic variety of manifestation in universe. The Samkhya philosophy resonant with echoes of the *Rigveda* and the *Shvetashwata Upanishad*, dear to the poet's heart, provide the philosophical support. The Samkhya system classifies the universe into two categories – Purusha and Prakriti, the former being the pure consciousness that is absolute, independent and beyond the grasp of finite verbal cognition, while Prakriti is the ever-active imperceptible in which all material manifestations are implicitly embedded with immense potency. The Purusha is the perceiver, the 'Bhokta' - the passive observer, the enjoyer while the Prakriti is the 'Bhogyā' or the enjoyed. The Samkhya philosophy identifies each sentient being as a fusion of both. The Prakriti interacts with the Purusha in the same body and an evolutionary process is triggered causing the worldly manifestations. Both the Samkhya philosophy and the *Upanishads* recognize a cardinal purpose of such a process to be the enjoyment and liberation - the Purusha and Prakriti unite and evolve as an indivisible whole. In his essay titled 'Akhondota' in *Pawnchovut*, Tagore mentions the same analogy. His overt identification of the female with Prakriti acts as an intriguing prelude to a striking identification of his own creative consciousness with Prakriti. He asserts -

Prakritir motoi ramanir ache kebol matro ichchshakti...manusher modhye duto angsho ache – akta

achetan, brihot, gupto ebong nischeshto, arekta sachetan, sokriyo, chonchol, poribortonshil.

[women have only will power like prakriti. In the human body there are two parts-one is vast, passive, unconscious and the other is active, restless and in a flux].

In *Chhinnopatraboli*, he echoes the ancient philosophy that perceives a totality in the ultimate merging of the Purusha and Prakriti. The devotee must yearn for a communion with the Transcendental like the Prakriti longing to be united with the Purusha. In letter no. 64 of *Chhinnopotro* and letter no. 70 of *Chhinnopatraboli* he describes the state of yearning and active evolution with a fascinating metaphor of germinating life in the process of the union with the eternal and Absolute consciousness. Interestingly he identifies himself with the fertile earth – the productive potency of Prakriti, essentially female, infused with the rays of the autumn sun – the radiant 'purusha' that penetrates the earth:

Ak somoy jokhon ami aei prithibir songe ak hoye chhilum, jokhon amar opor sobuj ghas uthto, sarat-er alo porto, surjokiron-e amar sudurbistrilo shyamol onger protyek romkup theke joubon-er sugondhi uttap utthito hote thakto, ami kawto...desh deshantor-er jol sthol parbat byapto kore ujjol akash-er niche nistobdho shuye pore thaktum, tokhon sarat surjalok-e amar brihot sarbange je ekti anondoros, ekti jibonishokti ottyonto obyakto ardhachetan ebong ottyonto prokando brihotvabe sancharito hote thakto tai jyano khanikta mone pore – amar aei je mon-er vaab e jyano aei protiniyoto onkurito mukulito pulakito surjosnata adim prithibir vaab.

[once when I was the same as the earth and green grass sprouted from me as the autumn sun rays brought out the fragrant heat of youth from every pore of my vast green body, I used to lie silent under the bright sky and the golden sun infused my body with a strange powerful bliss and life-force..my present state of mind is like that of the germinating, flowering, ancient earth bathed in the sun].

It is this identification and express act of gender subversion that in a sense reveals the philosophy behind his worship of the divine as a male or Purusha consciousness. The female position of Prakriti is necessary to evolve towards that degree of self surrender that would lead to the ultimate communion – a harmonious blending of the finite and the transcendental, the word and the meaning, the rhythm and the melody.

The urgency of assuming the role of 'prakriti' or the more feminine idiom of surrender as an essential prelude to the ultimate merging into the Absolute androgenic totality also relates to the ancient and medieval Indic literary history of gender subversions arching over the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, Vaishnavite ideology, Sufism, Shaivism, Christian influences, folklores and ethnic cultural overtones, that infused the poet's assimilative consciousness from an early stage. The Vaishnavite influences on Tagore have received scholarly attention in multiple contexts, but what is particularly significant in the present context, is the evolution of the theory of Radha as an embodiment of the metaphysical essence and power of Lord Krishna, the Transcendental Absolute. Song no. 34 in the "Pooja" phase projects the poetic self as exulted with an anticipation of the union with the beloved as his self proceeds dressed as a bride for her 'swayambar' or selection of her beloved as her bridegroom: "Tomay amay milon hobe bole / Joog-e joog-e bishwabhubantol-e / Poran amar bodhur beshe chole chiroswayambara [in every century my heart proceeds dressed as a bride in this universe to accept you for our union].

The Transcendental Absolute is yearned for in the form of male "pranesh"/lord of life, "param pati"/the Lord or husband, "pranonath"/Lord of life, "swami"/Husband, "Prabhu"/Master, "chirobanchhito"/the one always longed for,

or “priyo”/beloved, with the poet assuming the feminine tone of deep devotion like Radhika. Song no. 47 depicts a divine union in the sublime darkness of a silent night where the poet sings – “Amar sondhya phooler modhu/ Ebar je vog korbe bnodhu”[now my beloved will enjoy the nectar of my evening blossom]. One is reminded of the ancient Samkhya dichotomy of Purusha and Prakriti as “Bhokta” and “Bhogya”. Song no. 68 again addresses the divine as “jibano ballabho”[lord of life], “nityo premer dham-e amar porom poti”[my husband/Lord in the abode of eternal love] and “probhu”[Master] that are typically male identities with the poetic voice assuming a gender specific tone of the ladylove.

The metaphor of Radhika dressed as the bride for the Lord in Song 34 brings to mind the Christian tradition of the bride of Christ and there are interesting culturally established lines of coherence. Dr. Aronson in *Rabindranath through Western Eyes* argues that Tagore seemed to be “more Christian than Christians”(p.85). Christ, in the *Book of Isaiah* (Chapter 54), is the divine bridegroom of the Church and again in the ‘Book of Ruth’, the “bride of Christ” is said to wash herself with the Word, anoint herself with oil and dress in the fine linen of good works: Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. [Rev.19:7-8]

The gender projection is but denotative of the spiritual yearning for the ultimate communion, the preparation signifying faith and spirituality akin to what Tagore identifies as “sadhana”. In ‘*Corinthians*’, 11:2-3 (King John’s Version), Paul informs the Christians that he has “espoused” them to Christ: “I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present [you as] a chaste virgin to Christ.” Chastity here refers to unadulterated devotion and the Scriptures [Matthew.22:1-14] attach shame to Christians who have not for themselves a wedding garment of good deeds. Tagore’s response to the closeness between the Vaishnava philosophy and the Christian perception of the essential God-man relation comes out in *The Religion of Man*: “Nobody has exalted man more in every sphere than Jesus. The divinity of man is stressed by Jesus as by Vaishnava saints.”(p.52)

The sentiment of “biroho” or estrangement traditionally associated with Radha, is delicately woven through the texture of most of the songs of the ‘Pooja’ as the eternal longing for the union with the beloved is deferred perpetually. Song no.63 depicts the typical Vaishnavite yearning for the One who can never be grasped fully: “Mukher pan-e takate jai, dekhi dekhi dekhte na pai”(I try to look at his face and yet can never perceive). Radhika yearns for Krishna as he leaves for Mathura never to return again. This yearning encompasses the poet’s entire consciousness as he urges his beloved to return to his embrace amidst his smiles, tears, coyness or “chcholon” and love or “ador” in a song composed on 29th August 1894: “Amar chiro banchchito esho/Amar chiro sonjito esho/ ohe chonchol, hey chironton, vujobondhone fire esho...Amar mukher hasite esho/Amar chokher solil-e esho/amar ador-e, amar chcholon-e, amar obhiman-e fire esho.” [come back my beloved in my tears and smile and hugs].

The frequent use of the image of the flute traditionally associated with SriKrishna who entices and mesmerizes Radhika with his divine melody, is significant too. Radhika abandons her domestic security and rushes to meet her beloved with ardent devotion, attracted by the melody of the flute. Song no. 96 depicts an identical yearning that compels the poetic self to relinquish all material bondage for the magical melody that fills the firmament: “basha bandhar bandhon khana jak na tute/ Obadh pother sunnye ami cholbo chchute/ Sunyo vora tomar bnashir sur-e sur-e/ Hridoy amar sohoj sudhay dao na pur-e”[let the bondage of domesticity be severed, I will run to thee as the universe resonates with the melody of thy flute, fill my heart with the beauty of that music].When the “moner manush”(lord of the heart) leaves the slumbering self, the dark night is spent in estrangement on the “anchol” spread on the cold floor, the dark opacity pierced with the compelling call of the magical flute.

The surrendering self longs for the eternal union with the beloved. Song no.93 asserts—"Sob bandhon-e tomar sath bondi koro mor-e/Ohey ami bnadhon-kami"[Imprison me with yourself O Lord, I pray for such bondage]. This union is an intrinsic union in the form of a complete realization of the infinite in the finite frame. The incessant play of pleasure, longing, love, estrangement, sentimental complaints or unconditional self-surrender is a necessary prelude to a quest for self-realization that, in its turn, reconciles the self with the Absolute in a meaningful totality.

The Gaudiya Vaishnabite philosophy perceives Radha as an intrinsic part of the Supreme Creator Krishna. Radika is identified as the "hladini shakti" or the pleasure principle inherent in the metaphysical self of the divine Lord Krishna. She is the "paramananda" or the divine bliss that transcends the frontiers of material pleasure and is an eternal source of power. Krishna can be realized with His full potency only through the love of Sriradha. The "lila" or the material manifestations of the "hladini-shakti", mandatory for the complete realization of the power of the unitary form, being impossible in a single body, the arbitrary "Bheda" or differentiation into male and female entities is necessary. Sri Chaitanya, the greatest devotee of Krishna, has been perceived as the mortal manifestation of the conjoined form of the male and female facets of the Absolute.

Sashibhusan DasGupta in *Sri Radhar Kromo Bikash*, quotes a sloka from the *Bhagobad* which identifies the form of Sri Chaitanya as a morphological blend of the dark Krishna and the fair Radhika, divided in the same body and seared with an intense longing for the ultimate union: "Krishna barnang twishakrishnang/sangopangastro parshadam/jaggoi sangkirtan prayoi /jarjonti hee sumedhasah." Sashibhusan Dasgupta quotes Swaroop Damodar in support.

The *Puranas* appropriate similar willful gender subversion for the complete realization of the divine. In the *Padma Purana* composed in the twelfth century, Sanat Kumar tells Uddhava how Arjuna is metamorphosed into the female form of Arjuni, the equivalent of Radhika, by the grace of Lord Krishna and Devi Tripureshwari, for attaining a complete knowledge of the Absolute. Krishna says—"O Dhananjaya, I bless you...there is none equal to you in the three worlds, as you know my secret." In the introduction to the translation of this episode in *Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History*, Ruth Vanita discusses how Narad, the prime devotee of Lord Vishnu, undergoes the same metamorphosis while numerous male sages devoted to the Lord achieve rebirth as the 'gopinis' or the cowherd women of Brindaban. Vanita explains, "The Vaishnava rewriting of the idea of rebirth posits the woman's form as the highest human form attainable because it makes possible union with the divine, embodied in Krishna".

The Baul folklores that created a deep impact upon Tagore's creative self appropriate a similar contingency of the gender position. In the process of realizing the infinite divinity, the conventional notional confines of the sexed body are continually problematized. In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore refers to the Baul tradition of identifying the divine as the "moner manush" or the lord of the heart whom the self unites with through pure love; "For the sake of this love", quotes Tagore, "heaven longs to become earth and gods to become man". In the Introduction to Mohammed Monsuruddin's anthology of folk songs *Haramoni*, Tagore relates the Baul perception of the ardent quest for the "moner manush" or the beloved with the Upanishadic philosophy urging the soul to realize only the ultimate 'Purusha' without whom life is but the agony of death—"Tang bedyang purushong bedyang bedo ma bo mrityuh poribyathah".

The divine is imagined as the male beloved. In *Creative Unity*, Tagore points out—"He [the Baul] feels himself like a flute through which God's own breath of love has been breathed: My heart is like a flute he has played on...My lover's flute is dear to Him..."(p.25). The Absolute is conceived as a "lover" that the devotee seeks to unite with. This union of genders would take place in a single body that then may be said to transcend the restrictive sexed dimensions. Tagore's

essay 'An Indian Folk Religion' in *Creative Unity* records his appreciation of the ethnic modality of negotiating the frontiers of the traditional gendered discourse: "These Bauls have a philosophy, which they call the philosophy of the body...the underlying idea is that the individual's body is itself the temple, in whose inner mystic shrine the divine appears before the soul..."(p.24)

Interestingly this reminds one of the Christian conception of the body of Christ as a temple endorsed in *Colossians* 2:9-10. Three Cappadonian monks, Basil (329-379 AD), Gregory of Nazianzus(325-390 AD) and Gregory of Nyssa analyzed the Holy Trinity as the union of three 'hypostates' in one 'ousia', the Greek words signifying the characteristic and the generic respectively. Pope Leo, at the Council of Chanceldon in Asia Minor in 451 A.D. explained the Son or Christ the Logos as being homoousious with both the Father and mortal man. The body of blood and flesh as assumed by the Son of God, thus assumed the status of a temple that enshrined the divine. Tagore's vision comes close to this concept of the meeting of immanence and transcendence in one body, in Song no. 39.

The beloved husband lies asleep in the innermost chamber of the heart as the mortal self sings ardently in anticipation of a divine union:

mor Hridoyer gopono bijono ghor-e/ Aykela royechcho nirobo soyono por-e/Priyotomo hey
jago/Ruddho dwarer bahire dharaye ami/Ar kotokal emon-e katibe swami...Milabo noyono noyonero
sathe/Milabo e hat tobo dakhino hat-e...Hridoy patro sudhay purno hobe/Timir knapibe gobhiro aloro
rob-e [in the secret chamber of my heart thou sleepest silently O my beloved, wake up my
husband/master, how long should I stand alone outside the closed doors...our eyes will meet and our
hands will touch...my heart will overflow with the nectar of bliss as the dark night would tremble in
the passion and sound of profound illumination]

Again in Song no.85 the poet depicts the blissful love of the divine and the immanent in the single mortal body-"Aponare tumi dekhichcho modhur rosh-e/ Amar majhare nijere kori-ya daan"[you observe yourself in bliss by putting yourself in my immanent self]. The divine presence in the mortal frame had been anticipated by the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian ideology of the intrinsic presence of the One or the inner resplendent "logos endiathetos" –the later Christian the inner Word, and the external articulated "logos porphorikos" or human speech that continually strive to harmonize with the inner Word of God. From Epictetus, Chrysippus and Plotinus to Saint Augustine, the paradox of the One in many and many in One resonates with the same ideological paradox as in the Indian philosophy.

Sufi mysticism too appropriates gender fluidity in a passionate portrayal of the transcendental as the male beloved that the ardent devotee longs to reconcile to in an ecstatic embrace. "My Lord, eyes are at rest", sings the eighth century Sufi mystic Rabia al-Adawiyya, "the stars are setting, hushed are the movements of birds in their nests...My Lord, each lover is now alone with his beloved, and I am alone with Thee".¹ "All that I am, that I have, that I hope and all my love", sings Tagore in Song 91 of *Gitanjali*, "have ever flowed towards thee in depths of secrecy...the flowers have been woven into the wedding garland in my heart/Waiting for the day when you would come dressed as the bridegroom with a silent smile...I would lose my own place that day and unite with you like the bride with her bridegroom in the solitude of the night"(p.258). The resonances are evident. The subverted position of the gendered subject constituted in the projective field of conventional sexual bipolarity is intriguingly close. Margaret Smith in the introductory chapter of her *Readings from the Mystics of Islam* delineates the centrality of gendered love and passion in the Sufi perception of the divine:

The stages and stations [for complete communion] with their resultant qualities included repentance(tawba), Patience(sabr), gratitude(shukr), hope(raja), fear(khawf), poverty(faqr), renunciation(zuhd), meaning for the personal will in the Will of God(tawhid), dependence and trust in God(tawakul), Love(mahabba) including passionate longing for God(shawq), intimacy with Him(uns) and satisfaction with all He desires...of Love the Sufis have much to say: it is the "wine of life"...this is "pure love"...much of this is symbolical and expressed sometimes in sensuous form...earthly love may be used as a type of the divine Love.(pp.1-3)

Margaret translates Qurrat Al-Ayn also called Janab-i-Tahira (1852) whose perception of the divine as a male warlord comes strikingly close to Tagore's portrayal of the divine male beloved who leaves behind a dazzling sword. "Attraction to Thee and longing for Thee are factors", says Tahira, "which have bound all Thine afflicted lovers with the chains of grief...I will surely rise up to His sword and I will be satisfied with what pleases Him". Tagore's divine beloved inflicts pain in a similar fashion for the lover who is expressly identified as "naari" or woman in Song 52 of *Gitanjali* :

I thought I should ask of thee-but I dared not – the rose wreath thou hadst on thy neck...Ah me what is it I find? What token left of thy love? It is no flower, no spices, no vase of perfumed water. It is thy mighty sword, flashing as a flame, heavy as a bolt of thunder...The morning bird twitters and asks, "Woman, what hast thou got?"...I sit and muse in wonder, what gift is this of thine. I can find no place where to hide it...it hurts me when I press it to my bosom. Yet shall I bear in my heart this honour of the burden of pain, this gift of thine.(p.153)

The cumulative cultural and literary heritage lends a special potency to the overt feminine linguistic representations in Tagore's songs. The ultimate communion reflected in the ancient figure of the Ardhanariswara - the supreme androgenic form, the union of Purusha and Prakriti in the Samkhya philosophy and the Vedanta, or the Vaishnava ideal of Sri Gourango Chaitanya – all reflect a totality beyond the gender dichotomy, beyond a bipolarity willfully created to experience the most intense level of yearning or devotion necessary for a complete realization of the power inherent in the conjoined unit. The beginning and the end may be the eternally tranquil harmonious composite, the divine beyond gender specifications, but the full realization of its own potency necessitates an infinite play of intriguing gender subversions in terms of devotion.

As Umberto Eco argues in *Inventing the Enemy*, "we ourselves enter to become part of the Absolute, since the Absolute...would be the indissoluble unity of the conscious being and of such things that were once considered extraneous to the individual."(p.23). Evoking the figure of the Rudra or Shiva, in a sense a fountainhead of the composite icon, Tagore asserts in Song no. 71, *Pooja* – "Apono monero meghe swaponi aponi rocho robi/...tomaro jot-e ami tomar vabero janhobi...Mukulo momo subash-e tobo gopon-e sourobhi"(You create the sun with the dreamy cloud of your heart...I am the ganges of your feelings emerging from thy fountainhead...my nascent bud is fragrant with thine secret perfume). What emerges through such intense melody is the mystique of the transgender – the interplay of two genders in one and its subsequent splitting into separate forms for a fascinating play of intense experiences necessary for a full realization and ultimate blending in the supreme unitary Absolute.

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